

North Yorkshire Wider Partnership Conference 2025: Workshop 3 – Embedding Lived Experience into Your Organisation (a unique partnership between Up For Yorkshire and York St John University)

Facilitators:

- Chris Hailey-Norris & Bryony Boyle – Up For Yorkshire
- Dr Amy Skinner – York St John University

The Workshop

The session took participants through the first year of a collaboration between Up for Yorkshire and York St John University, exploring how to engage people with lived experience more effectively in the work of a VCSE organisation with the intention of sharing the learning with the sector. Presenters described phase two plans to develop and evaluate a new Lived Experience Group for Selby, and early insights from the Lived Experience Steering Group shaping the SWIFT Project, supporting migrant communities in North Yorkshire.

A powerpoint from Up for Yorkshire and notes from Dr Amy Skinner have been made available to participants.

Chris then described some “doing” of incorporating lived experience voices into service delivery. The SWIFT project (supporting migrant communities) was made aware of the perils of over reliance on tech tools for translation as a very formal tone could emerge rather undoing the aim of seeking to develop a friendly and familiar feel through language. This insight resulted in the development of regular online conversation sessions where participants could begin to unlock some of the mysteries of everyday English in a Yorkshire setting.

Having acquired funding for a second phase the research project will enable more “doing” (see powerpoint).

Chris also described some of the powerful tools to encourage people to offer their lived experience:

- Rewarding participation e.g. gift voucher of choice
- Providing light refreshments
- Careful choice of time (early evening but could vary depending on group etc)

In developing a “Community Think Tank” Chris was keen to open the door wide and his experience is that diversity has emerged naturally through making the opportunities visible, using networks etc. However, there was also a recognition that self-selection can carry risks with some voices remaining hidden and professionals can certainly play a role in identifying potential participants who might need encouraging to participate. People can bring a supporter. Bryony said that it could be quite challenging to describe the ask initially, particularly where being invited to share their lived experience was a new concept for people. Experience suggested

that as the understanding of initial participants grew through action they would take on that role of explaining purpose and attracting more interest.

For organisations wanting to hear the voice of lived experience it is important to know what they will do with the responses. An obvious time to engage is when planning a new service or funding bid.

There was a short conversation about “intersectionality” and the impacts of our individual characteristics or identities and managing boundaries or clarity of focus appropriately in research contexts. There was also a recognition that lived experience will tend to push against or move over boundaries. This can be particularly apparent in conversations about social justice when individuals will bring a range of perspectives from their lived experience.

Chris emphasised the importance of demonstrating impact to participants. In the SWIFT context this would be addressed by posing the question: “So, what has happened?” (as a result of our input / answers etc) or using a story board or “You said” “We did” format.

The product for a research project is generally an academic paper. Essential though this is it may not be the most accessible format for participants. This means that findings must also be presented in a more easily digestible way. This is true for questions posed to a lived experience group too. Some will have obvious purpose but in other cases the organisation posing the question may be searching for a more nuanced response e.g. as part of an initial feeling the way towards the early stages of a new way of working.

In response to a question Chris described the different approaches for the SWIFT project and the Community Think Tank (Phase 2). The SWIFT group was an open group, incorporating new members and without a fixed number involved. As part of the phase 2 research the Community Think Tank was a fixed group with the expectation that people commit for a year and membership could then be refreshed.

Gift voucher value for engagement is £20 per session plus travel and refreshments. The evaluation and research group members are paid for their time. This is a bit more complicated.